

two states.

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8. GREY HERON *ARDEA CINEREA* SCAVENGING ON CATTLE CARCASS

On January 1, 2000 at 1830 hrs while returning from a bird watching trip to Gangapur Dam, 14 km west of Nashik (Maharashtra), we saw 35 Indian white-backed vultures *Gyps bengalensis* roosting on two large mango (*Mangifera indica*) trees. As it was dusk, we could not investigate why the vultures were attracted to the mango trees. The next day, at 1600 hrs, we reached the same site. While approaching the mango trees, we saw 18 black kites *Milvus migrans migrans* circling low over a pair of cow carcasses 200 m ahead. There were also a number of house crows *Corvus splendens*, two Indian white-backed vultures *Gyps bengalensis* and three dogs feeding on the carcasses. Surprisingly, we also found a grey heron *Ardea cinerea* watching the carcasses from a distance of c. 40 cm. It began edging towards

the carcass and then suddenly and swiftly came upon the kill, and tearing a chunk of meat moved 2 m away to feed on it. This is strange behaviour on the part of the grey heron, which normally feeds on fish, frogs, etc. (Ali and Ripley 1983). Snow *et al.* (1998) mentioned the food of grey heron as chiefly fish, amphibians, small mammals, insects and reptiles; occasionally crustaceans, molluscs, worms and plant material. Grey heron scavenging on a carcass in grasslands is quite unusual.

June 9, 2000

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